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ABSTRACT

A "global simulation" is a class activity allowing students to encounter situations that include love, life, and death in a simulated environment. This paper describes several possible simulations. Each one can be integrated into a variety of intermediate- to advanced-level curricula such as a conversation class, a culture and civilization class, or a writing class. Distinctions are made between functional and global simulations. Functional simulations are particularly adaptable to the curriculum of the specialty (foreign) language class (e.g., Business English, English for Hotel Management and Tourism, or English in the Health Professions). The simulation "The Building" is described in detail with instructions for further developing the idea to teach culture, lifestyles, and customs. Students may write a personal journal, essay, or composition; or the project may be to write a novel, with students creating the plot together and then dividing up the chapters. Adapting "The Building" to the use of the Internet is discussed. Infrastructure, equipment, and procedures used at the University of San Diego are listed. Tips for success are provided. (EMK)

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Chapter Eight

The Building: An Adaptation of Francis Debyser's Writing Project. A Global Simulation to Teach Language and Culture

Michèle Claude Magnin

The following is a very succcessful class activity for the foreign language classroom. It can be used to teach English as a second language, as well as Cantonese, Spanish, Vietnamese or Italian. Professors in Spain, Germany, Cuba, Italy, French Polynesia, and Hungary have practiced this idea in very different environments and at different levels: this activity can be carried out with students starting at age eleven or twelve all the way through young and mature adults attending university or continuing education classes. It provides opportunities to teach oral language skills as well as written proficiency.

A Global Simulation

This class activity is called a "global simulation," i.e. a simulation that allows students to encounter situations that include love, life and death. It is a place where culture and experiences convene, and where a world is constructed using a foreign language in a playful atmosphere. It is different from the kind of simulation offered by many language textbooks which are restricted to one situation, as in the following example: "You arrive in a hotel and the clerk cannot find your reservation. Imagine the dialog between you and the clerk." This, although a culturally rich situation, is rather limited.

Compare it to the following examples of:

global simulations	**&**	**functional simulations**:
Islands		the hotel
the building		the business enterprise
the village		the international conference
the circus		the hospital

Here is a very brief description of three of these simulations to offer a better idea of the wide range of possibilities:

1. *Islands:* Imagine that a group of people in a shipwreck arrives on a deserted island. They form a new community, invent their

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environment and define it, determine the rules by which they will live. Students negotiate in the target language and each role is distributed: who will get the water, the wood for the fire, hunt or fish for food, cook, build boats, etc. The shape of the island, the fauna and flora are invented. The simulation of the island can terminate on a happy note such as a rescue.

2. *The village:* A site and a time period are chosen. Each villager selects an identity starting with a name, age and occupation. The professions will be those needed to support the population of the village. A historical past can be invented for the village with a local hero whose biography can be written. Students imagine the claim to fame of the village (cheese, car factory, monument), folklore and customs, the architecture of the houses. A newspaper can be created to report the local events. This simulation can end on a positive note such as the visit of a high-ranking official or a major festive celebration. It can also end on a creative note such as the historiography of the village by a famous writer.
3. *The hotel:* First a setting must be chosen (city, beach, mountain) and a category (luxury or cheap) to determine the type of clientele. Then two groups have to select their identity: the employees of the hotel (a good review of the professions from the bell boys to the managers) and the customers (a group of tourists, a family from Ohio, a singer on tour, or a group of teachers attending a conference). The students learn about the daily running of a hotel, write a promotional flyer to attract tourists; they can also reproduce and fill out the forms. Major events or incidents can occur (floods, official visitors, thefts)

Each of these can be integrated into a variety of curricula, from a conversation class to a culture and civilization or writing class at intermediate to advancedlevels. Functional simulations are particularly well adapted to the curricula of specialty language class:

1. Business English (the business enterprise, the hotel, and the international conference)
2. English for hotel management and tourism (the hotel)
3. English in the health professions (the hospital)

Each can lead to a final masterpiece such as a novel written collectively, or a play, or an exhibit for the artistic work created during the simulation (posters, maps, pictures). Students should be able to look forward to this concrete conclusion throughout the project.

The building is a great tool to teach a variety of writing styles, and techniques, syntax, vocabulary and culture. At the same time it offers the appeal of a playful activity. This idea was published by Francis Debyser in 1980 (Hachette) and was first used during teacher workshops at the BELC[1] and the CIEP[2] in France as early as 1978. Adapting it to the use of electronic mail and

the world wide web seemed logical, efficient and beneficial to the students. We crossed this threshold at the University of San Diego in 1995.

This activity constitutes less than half of the composition class curriculum: it is used in conjunction with grammar exercises and textual analysis and closely integrated. For instance, writing about the childhood of the tenants, the review of the past and reading an autobiographical text are carefully intertwined. When the students describe their new identity, we analyze texts exemplifying the technique of the physical or psychological portraits, while reviewing the use of adjectives and adverbs.

First we will describe the activity and its cultural components.

The Building

The students become the tenants in a building. They are going to "pretend" or "make believe" two things:

1. to live someplace else
2. to be someone else

If the foreign language taught is English, the building can be located in New York, Los Angeles, or London. Then, students choose a name and an identity. They will describe themselves in a personal journal, and in compositions that will be read by the rest of the class. Very quickly, a sense of community is born, and interactions in the building become very lively as the teacher develops ideas for the students to write about. Invitations are made, encounters take place, incidents occur in the building, and major events in the city affect tenants' lives. For Chinese students, you can explain or relate the type of communal life of the building as being similar to that in a ***danwei***. When the characters have become familiar with each other and a good dynamic is well established within the group, it is time to write together a detective story taking place in the building. The experience culminates with the theatrical production of a scene from the detective story or mini-novel, where the students play their part in a dialog they have written.

Teaching Culture

The **city** where your building is, the **people** who live there, and the local **customs** they practice will be the vehicles to teach culture.

1. THE CITY

The choice of a city is the first step. When teaching English as a second language in China, you may decide at the beginning that you prefer to teach about the United States rather than England.

- Comparing **maps** of Shanghai and the Los Angeles area sets off differences in the layout. Los Angeles offers many grids and few circular patterns except when urban development followed the natural layout of the terrain such as canyons, and steep hills.
- **Streets** provide many cultural insights through the width of the streets and sidewalks, thenumber of pedestrians, the look and number of cars.

- The **architecture** of the buildings are good indicators: Are there shops on the bottom floor, offices or apartments above, windows that open, balconies?
- **Interior decoration** illustrates lifestyles. An American kitchen usually displays a microwave oven and a toaster. Television sets appear in the family room, bedrooms and sometimes even in kitchens, showing the importance of this medium in the culture.

2. THE PEOPLE

The second step is the choice of an identity as a tenant in the building. Each student will choose a name (it can indicate ethnic origin), an age (***all*** the students should not "pretend" to be a 15 or 20 year-old student living in a foreign country to learn the language), a gender and a profession or occupation, hobbies, family members and friends:

- Some professions and occupations could be, according to age and sex: (a) shopkeeper, (b) secretary, (c) salesman, (d) cook, (e) ballerina, (f) lawyer, (g) artist, (h) poet, (i) journalist, (j) housewife, (k) baseball player, (l) telephone operator, (m) retired teacher, (n) hotel receptionist, (o) doctor, (p) student, (q) truck driver, (r) accountant.
- Hobbies: (a) sports or movies, (b) reading, (c) dancing, (d) gardening, (e) playing cards, (f) singing. Each of these hobbies gives an opportunity to describe very different places and the people who practice these activities, the way they dress, and interact.
- families can be small or large, the tenant can be very sociable and have many friends or be a loner.

3. THE CUSTOMS

Local customs provide many opportunities for interaction and meaningful communication as well as chances to ask questions and learn. As you read the following list of topics,picture these activities in another English-speaking country very different from the United States (India, Jamaica, South Africa or Australia).

- Getting settled and meeting the neighbors, colleagues or shop-keepers.
- Meeting people in the street or in the apartment building - informal invitations, greetings, polite phrases.
- Opening a bank account, obtaining telephone service, utilities, newspaper delivery.
- Furnishing the apartment.
- Shopping for groceries.
- Major holidays (Christmas, New Year, Valentine's day, Easter, Memorial Day[3], 4th of July, Labor day, Halloween and Thanksgiving), birthday parties, baby showers, school reunions, graduations.
- Etiquette for using technology (telephone, answering machines, faxes).
- An inheritance (who is it from, and what is it).

- Looking for work: an opportunity to discuss resumé writing. Also a chance for students to look at their own future and ambitions, and to compare work conditions (hours, salary, promotions).
- A serious problem at work with a look at solutions and customary ways to handle the situation.
- Shopping for a car (and a look at public transportation available). going on vacation (where, and with whom).
- Life in the building a hundred years ago (a little history).
- Moving away. (To conclude: the building will be destroyed to make room for a shopping mall, the celebration of ten years spent in the building, or a reunion).

These are all opportunities to discover a different world, to communicate and use the target language, in this case, English, either in oral or written contexts. They constitute incentives that will motivate the students to find out more about each of these topics, to explore and learn the vocabulary to deal with them. The instructor can be the main provider of information and bring pictures, slides, or movies to class. Students can do their own research at the library or on the Web. This information can be compiled in files kept by the students on index cards or computer files, and shared with the rest of the class.

Teaching Writing

As mentioned above, the students write a personal journal as the tenant. They also write essays or compositions. The topics assigned contribute to make the building come to life, by allowing the tenants to describe themselves, their activities, and their interactions with other tenants.

The journals are not corrected in a detailed fashion. This is an extensive writing exercise where students write freely, and structure is not as important as developing ideas. Encouraging comments are made, and explanations are given to help the student understand a couple of important syntactical points, but not too many. It is a way to develop arguments freely about their character. Topics for this exploration are given each week and constitute a preparation for the compositions.

The compositions are written twice. On the first draft, the instructor indicates with a code the types of mistakes made (i.e. "T" for tense, "S" for spelling). The students make the appropriate corrections and turn in the second draft. (Both are graded.) This is intensive writing, great efforts are made to produce a near perfect text. The topics call for a variety of styles and techniques: (a) the portrait, (b) the parody, (c) narration and dialogues, (d) summaries and amplification exercises. Students write individually as well as collectively and in the second case, they correct each others' work.

Adapting The Building To The Use Of Internet

The importance of the communicative aspect of this written activity makes its adaptation to the use of internet particularly beneficial. It is essential for the information to circulate quickly to each tenant so they learn who their neighbors are, and can start interacting faster. Photocopying would be very costly and time consuming. Electronic mail is very fast and a message can be sent to one or 20 students with no extra effort thanks to a class list established. It is also entirely free to both the instructor and the students.

Infrastructure And Procedures

The procedures and equipment used at the University of San Diego are as follows:

1. Class meets three times a week for 50 minutes in a regular classroom. Except for the first class session where a short orientation in the computer laboratory is needed, students write and use the computers outside of class time.
2. Students have access to computer labs during the day or in the evening on the university campus.
3. Students each have their own personal e-mail account with an internet address and a password. It allows them to send and receive messages and pictures electronically. They also have unlimited access to the world wide web where they can obtain information on many different topics, such as geography, music, news, history, art or sports and many more.
4. Professors also have e-mail accounts, and can create a web site where pertinent information and useful links are gathered. It is updated regularly with new URLs.
5. Individual comments and are sent by e-mail. The students receive them almost immediately. But it is just like regular mail: if you do not open your mailbox, you do not know that you have a letter waiting. Therefore, it is extremely important to make sure the students check their e-mail regularly and to send essential messages from the very beginning. E-mail must become a daily habit. Pen-pals on the internet are a good way to reinforce this habit.
6. The instructor's role in showing all the pertinent resources available on the web is crucial. The following can all be used to enrich the "invention" of the building and its environment: (a) dictionaries, (b) encyclopedias, (c) maps, (d) paintings, (e) catalogs, (f) tourist information, (g) facts about demography, (h) climate, (i) history and the economy of many countries, (j) data on major companies, their products and hiring policies,
7. Students who are computer literate can create their own web site with a picture of the virtual building, photographs or drawings of the tenants, their biographies, and maps.

8. Towards the middle of the semester, a detective story takes place in the building. The class is divided into groups of three students who draft an outline of the plot. The best one is selected by vote. Each group then writes a chapter of the mini-novel which will be published at the end of the semester. A scene of the detective story is selected to be rewritten as a dialogue which the students will play in front of the others. It is a renewed opportunity for the student to express their creativity through language, acting, staging, and props.
9. During this mini-play, the instructor can take photographs to be included in the publication. It is the confirmation of their work and a goal during the semester. The scenes can also be videotaped.
10. The compositions and the journals written on the computer look professional. It is an accomplishment the students can take pride in, take home and show their parents or friends.
11. The simulation can be taken beyond the classroom. Two or more classes can cooperate and have neighboring buildings. Professors can organize exchanges and common projects electronically throughout the world.

Conclusion

To ensure the success of this project, it is essential:
(a) to be open-minded about the outcome,
(b) to circulate information fast,
(c) to facilitate exchanges between students, and
(d) to use the tenants' characters and current events to enliven the dynamic of the building and create stimulating interactions.

When using the internet, make sure that you:
(a) use e-mail efficiently,
(b) encourage students,
(c) are present whenever technical problems arise to help students find solutions before they become discouraged, and
(d) provide guidance to explore the web

Global simulations have been around now for twenty years. They have engendered abundant enthusiasm with teachers and students alike. Students remember this experience with excitement and, a year or two later, still recall how they enjoyed the class because of this activity, and how they never before, or since, enjoyed writing so much in a class. For the professor, it is a way of traveling outside of the classroom and to foster active participation from the students. It is also a perfect vehicle to create a multi-cultural learning environment.

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Footnotes:

[1] Bureau de l'Enseignement des Langues et de la Culture

[2] Centre International d'Etudes PÈdagogiques

[3] similar to Qing Ming Festival in China